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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The concrete vessel sink and warmly colored countertop are by J. Aaron Cast Stone. For this project, artisans at Buddy Rhodes made concrete in custom colors of moss and slate-green, inset with veins of sand and coal, to complement earthy Motawi tiles. Horizontal expanses of concrete top a floating vanity in this Asian-inspired bathroom by FormFunction Concrete.

CONCRETE *Capability*

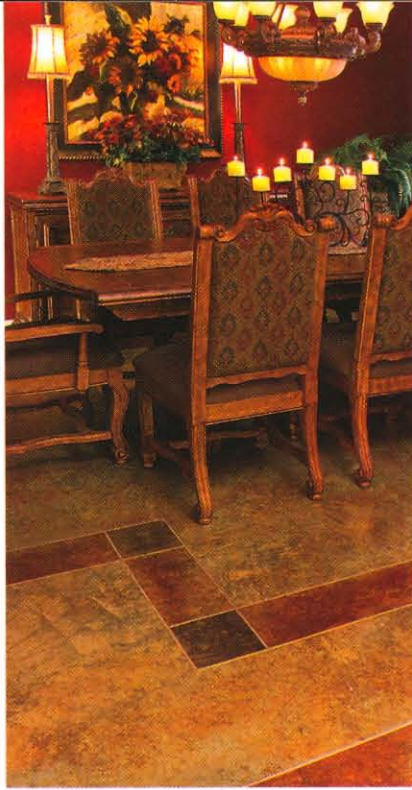
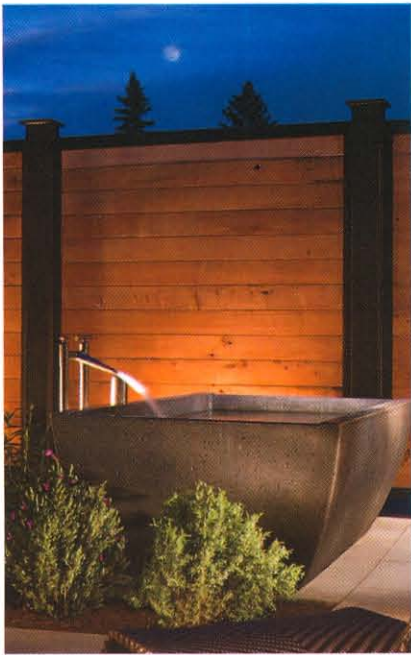
Recent innovations and a plethora of products and artisans have made concrete a coveted material. BY BRIAN D. COLEMAN

A MANMADE MATERIAL that resembles stone, concrete is made by mixing cement (a fine powder of clay and limestone) with aggregate and water, which sets and binds the materials together. Varying the aggregate determines the finish: coarse gravel is used for construction, while fine sand produces a smooth finish. Today concrete can be found in homes as period-appropriate complements from the foundation up, including countertops and floors in kitchens and baths, fireplace hearths and surrounds, benches, bathtubs and sinks, shower stalls, walls and windowsills.

A lot of the appeal of concrete is its chameleonlike quality, points out Susan Andrews of San Francisco's Buddy Rhodes Studio. Concrete can

be formed in nearly any finish and color, often inspired by an element in the room. Take, for example, a Berkeley homeowner who asked for kitchen counters to complement the earth tones of Motawi tiles inset in the backsplash (shown above).

THE PROCESS BEGINS with an exact template made on site. Then the artisans return to the studio, where custom molds are formed in melamine, and the concrete is poured. The finished countertop is installed, glued into place, grouted, and its final finish applied. A monthly waxing (Andrews likes a combination of olive oil and beeswax) keeps concrete looking good for years; remember to clean up spills as quickly as possible, because oils and acids can cause stains.



LEFT TO RIGHT: Concrete is as elegant as it is practical for an outdoor spa; this one is by Sonoma. Kemiko products were used to stain this custom interior floor. Colored and sealed concrete makes a luxury driveway (Kemiko). **BELOW:** The “wave sink” by Sonoma Cast Stone is an example of their metal-finished concrete.

Handmade by skilled craftspeople, custom-designed concrete requires time, skill, and expertise; it usually runs about \$100 per square foot, about the cost of high-grade marble or granite.

In decades past, concrete was used mostly for floors—and it doesn't

concrete underneath can be cleaned and restained for an updated and affordable flooring solution. Preparation includes thorough cleaning and neutralization; this and topcoat application are best left to trained applicators with special equipment. After a topcoat is applied, McCullough suggests a mop-on polish (such as Kemiko's “Easy Shine”) or a buff-on wax (like Kemiko's “Stone Tone Wax II”), which lasts for years with occasional buffing.

Concrete is being reinvented in new and exciting ways. Sonoma Cast Stone's “MetalCrete,” for example, “plates” metal (copper, brass, nickel, steel) onto concrete for the solid feel of stone with the sparkle of a metallic finish. How about furniture made of concrete? Portland, Oregon-based Cunin Design's undulating lounge is not only sexy, but ergonomic and comfortable, too. †

have to be hidden any longer, explains George McCullough of Quaker Chemical, which produces Kemiko products. Tired wood and linoleum floorings are being pulled up so the



SOURCES . . .

for materials & instruction

- **KEMIKO DECORATIVE & INDUSTRIAL COATINGS:** (800) 875-4596, kemiko.com
- **FABCRETE:** (888) 547-7950, fabcrete.com

for design & construction

- **BUDDY RHODES ARTISAN CONCRETE (CA):** (877) 706-5303, buddyrhodes.com
- **FORM FUNCTION CONCRETE (MA):** (978) 432-1093, formfunctionconcrete.com
- **J. AARON CAST STONE (GA):** (404) 298-4200, jaaroncaststone.com
- **STONE SOUP CONCRETE (MA):** (800) 819-3456, stonesoupconcrete.net
- **CUNIN DESIGN (OR):** (503) 715-0080, portlandconcretecountertops.com
- **SONOMA CAST STONE (CA):** (877) 939-9929, sonomastone.com

for inspiration & directories

- concreteexchange.com
- concretenetwork.com

for repair materials & sealants

- **ABATRON:** (800) 4455-1754, abatron.com [AboCoat is their epoxy coating for concrete surfaces]
- **BEAUMONT PRODUCTS:** (800) 451-7096, trewax.com
- **KEMIKO DECORATIVE & INDUSTRIAL COATINGS:** (800) 875-4596, kemiko.com